3

A

SECOND LETTER

to the

INHABITANTS OF MANCHESTER,

on the

Exportation

of

COTTON TWIST.

BY MERCATOR.

Manchester,

Printed by R. & W. Dean, No. 9, Spring-gardens;
and
Sold by I. W. & W. Clarke, Market-place,
and all the other Booksellers.

1800.

A

SECOND LETTER

to the

INHABITANTS OF MANCHESTER,

&c.

My friends and fellow townsmen,

"There may," says Lord Clarendon, "be better earth, better air, and a warmer sun in other countries; but England is an inclosure of the best people in the world, *when they are well informed and instructed.*" Permit me, therefore, to add a little information to that, which my former letter to you contains, on the subject of the export of cotton-yarns, and allow me to thank you for the favorable manner, in which you received it.

You remember, perhaps, that I alluded several times to the importance and value of the spinning business to this country; but the limits of that publication, and my time, did not permit me to enlarge upon the subject. As it will be of particular use to you, in the discussion which at this time deservedly engages your attention, to possess every

information on this point, I shall make it the principal subject of this letter.

I stated to you that the spinning business employs 40,000 hands. This is to be understood as relating to the manufactory of such yarns only as are spun upon mules and water-frames. This number, however, is much below the truth, and was purposely stated in this manner to avoid even the appearance of exaggeration, at a time, when it was not convenient to lay the computation itself before you. I may tell you now, that the part of the spinning business, above alluded to, employs upwards of 76,000 hands, exclusively engaged in the immediate process of preparing cotton and spinning it into yarn, without taking into the account a great number of auxiliary hands, such as mechanics, &c. employed in cotton-mills. The way, in which I make this calculation is briefly this. The quantity of cotton, imported into Great Britain in the year 1799, amounted to nearly 46 millions of pounds in weight. One half, or 23 millions, at least, of this cotton is spun into yarn upon mules and water-frames, and reckoning only 16d. per pound upon an average of high and low numbers, for wages, which every one of you, who is in the least conversant with the business, will readily admit to be extremely moderate; and reckoning farther the weekly wages at 8s. a head on an average, and fifty working weeks in a year; the result will be, that the mule and water-spinning maintain up-

wards of 76,000 hands, who receive annually more than a million and a half pounds sterling in wages, independently of a great number of other work-people, who, directly and indirectly, derive their subsistence from cotton-mills. You must be sensible that such a computation, from the nature of the subject, is not capable of perfect accuracy; but, if you impartially consider the *data* on which the above calculation is made, you cannot but admit, that the result is much below the truth. Only one eighth of this number are men, the remainder consists of women and children, who, by means of this manufacture, are able to maintain themselves comfortably, and many of them would, without this resource, be useless, if not burthensome to the public. The ready opportunity for employment, which cotton-mills afford to the younger and more helpless branches of the community, is of extreme importance. They are schools for industry, order, and cleanliness to the young, who, when grown up, engage in other branches of the manufacture with habits of diligence and order, and frequently with some mechanical knowledge, which, in process of time, cannot fail to produce some good effects; and by maintaining themselves, they enable the heads of their families to do their work at a lower rate; labour is thereby kept at a more moderate price, and the manufacturer of piece-goods reaps the advantage of it by saving some expence in the weaving, cutting, dying, and other processes of his manufacture.

But the immediate advantages to the country from this manufacture are not confined to the employment of the hands in the spinning itself. Several other trades receive occupation and derive benefit from it. It would be tedious to enumerate them. A tolerable idea may be formed of the advantages resulting from it, by considering, that the value of the raw material, taken at a fair average price, is more than doubled by being converted into yarn; in many cases it is trebled, and even quadrupled. To this must be added the advantage accruing to the country from the profits of the importer of the raw material, from the revenue to the state, from freight and carriage, from the encouragement to inland navigation, and, what is of peculiar interest to this nation, from the employment of shipping and seamen, it requiring nearly sixty ships of 200 tons each, to bring to this country the quantity of cotton annually wanted for the consumption of the spinner, without taking into the account the shipping employed in the coasting trade, and in the exportation of the manufactured article.

Many of you, I have no doubt, will recollect very well (for it is little more than twenty years ago) that the greatest part of the goods, manufactured in this town was made with linen warps. All the pillows, jeans, jennets, and callicoes (then called blackburn-greys) most of the cords and thicksets, and many velverets, were made with warps of Hamburgh yarn. Even the

warps for dimities were half linen. To procure this linen yarn, we were obliged to have recourse to the nations on the continent, and large sums of our money went annually abroad in payment for this commodity, the price of which was considerably enhanced by passing through the hands of the merchants abroad, and the yarn-merchant at home, before it came to the manufacturer. The case is very different now. The English spinner directly furnishes the manufacturer with yarns spun by the industrious poor of this island, at a lower price, and of an infinitely better quality. This is not all; he even supplies with yarn the very nations, who formerly supplied us; thus turning in a double capacity the balance of trade in our favour.

Many of you must likewise recollect, that, about the same time, the manufacturer paid from 3s. to 3s. 6d. for the spinning of a pound of cotton into 24 hanks of weft, which, at that period, was equal at least to 6s. or 7s. at this time; or in other words, 3s. at that period would have purchased a greater quantity of labour and provisions than 6s. in our days. Are not you sensible, that if the art of spinning had remained in this low state, your manufactures would have been very confined, not only on account of their high prices, but also because it would have been impossible to find a sufficient number of hands to spin a great quantity? It would indeed require more than a million of people to spin by hand the quantity of yarn

now consumed in this town. And are you not aware, that your trade would labour under these disadvantages, if by the spirit, zeal, and ingenuity of the spinner, his machinery had not been brought to its present perfection? To form a proper estimate of the advantage of these improvements, we only need to compare the prices of yarns at a former period, with those of later times.

A. D.	Price of No. 20.	Price of No. 30.	Price of No. 40.	Price of No. 50.	Price of No. 60.
1781	5s. 2d.	7s. 4d.	10s. 10d.	17s. 1d.	22s. 8d.
1785	3 11	5 8	8 11	14 4	21 6
1790	3 10	5 2	7 5	10 7	14 4
1795	3 3	4 3	6 2	8 8	

You will observe, that the price of a pound of water-twist of 50 hanks, which in the year 1781 cost 17s. 1d. was only 8s. 8d. in the year 1795. The difference in the higher numbers of mule-twist is still more striking, as will appear from the following statement:

Prices per lb. in 1789.		Prices per lb. in 1800.	
No. 140.....	£2 18 0	No. 140.....	£0 18 3
130	2 10 0	130	0 14 11
120	2 2 0	120	0 12 6
110	1 16 4	110	0 10 5
100	1 10 6	100	0 9 4
90	1 5 6	90	0 8 6

Prices per lb. in 1789.				Prices per lb. in 1800.			
No. 80.....	£1	1	4	No. 80.....	£0	7	8
73	0	19	0	73	0	7	1
60	0	12	9	60	0	6	0

You will perceive, that, from No. 140 down to No. 70, the difference in price, in the short space of eleven years, is as three to one. It should be noticed, that cotton is at present much dearer, and the value of money much lower. If due allowance were made for the advance of cotton, and the depreciated value of money, the difference would be nearly as five to one. This truly astonishing reduction in price has been uniformly accompanied by great improvements in the quality of yarns, and the manufacturer of piece-goods has thereby been enabled, not only to furnish his produce at a lower price and of a better quality, but also to manufacture other new and valuable articles. For the earliest of these we are indebted to the exertions of the father of spinners, Sir Richard Arkwright. He was the first who made callicoes with cotton warps, and it is probably owing to him, that this branch of our trade is so extensive and in so flourishing a condition. Before that time, coarse callicoes (as before observed) were made with linen warps, procured from abroad, and those of a finer quality were purchased at the sales of the East India Company. The same was the case on the continent. The coarser sorts were made with linen yarn, and the better

qualities were bought at the East India sales in Denmark, Holland, France, and England. By furnishing our continental neighbours with twist, we enable them to manufacture all, or nearly all, the callicoes they want, from which a double advantage results to us: we gain by our dealings with them in yarn; and we make them better and richer customers by giving them an opportunity of employing their capitals and industry in manufactures, instead of sending their money out of the country for the purchase of East India goods.

Nankeens and ginghams are manufactures, which, without the improvements effected by the spinner, could not possibly have succeeded. These articles too were formerly brought from the East exclusively.

But the most valuable manufacture, which has been created in consequence of the successful application of the spinner to perfect his machinery, is that of muslins, which bids fair to become the most extensive and lucrative of any in this country. The rapidity, with which it approaches to perfection, and its surprizing extent, in the short space of fifteen years, warrant me in saying, that, if the improvements of the spinner had produced no other benefit, this alone would entitle him to the consideration and gratitude of the nation. By the cheapness and superiour quality of his yarn, we are enabled to employ thousands of looms in the production of this valuable and elegant article of dress; to keep in

the country millions of specie, which was heretofore sent to the East to purchase this commodity; and to cloathe ourselves with this fabric at one third of the expence formerly required. The demand for and the use of this article are proportionate to its cheapness and elegance, and it is not difficult to see that it will become a staple manufacture of this country.

Compare the present state of Manchester and its trade with what it was only fifteen years ago. Follow the course of the rivers and observe how many new establishments for dying, printing, bleaching, &c. have sprung up, and how much the old ones are enlarged. Consider the increase of its population, and the number of houses and cottages, that has been built in that short space of time. Look at the encreased number and size of the warehouses of your merchants. Observe the adjacent towns and villages, and compare them with what they were fifteen years ago. What were Stockport and Bolton? What are they now? Has not the cotton business stretched out into larger and larger circles? Has it not drawn into its vortex an immense population from other counties, from Scotland and from Ireland?—These considerations will give you some idea of the rapid progress of the cotton manufactory, but a just estimate can only be formed by comparing with one another the imports of cotton in different years.

The annual imports were, upon an average, in

the years	1771	to 1775	.....	4,764,589 lb.
	1776	to 1780	.....	6,706,013
	1781	to 1785	.....	10,901,934
	1786	to 1790	.....	25,443,670 *
and in the year	1799	about	....	46,000,000

From this statement it appears, that in the short space of 28 years the cotton-manufacture of this kingdom has encreased to ten times its former extent. This rapid progress is so different from the slow and gradual improvement of manufactures in general, that we must ascribe it to some extraordinary cause. Has it been effected by any sudden and great influx of capital? If we look around us we shall find few, if any capitalists that have enriched the trade, but we shall, on the contrary, find a great number of individuals that have been enriched by the trade in so short a time, that it appears but as yesterday. —Have any improvements been made in the process of weaving, and the subsequent parts of the manufacture, of sufficient magnitude to produce these extraordinary

* See a report of the select committee of the court of directors of the East India Company 1793. I am sorry that it has not been in my power to procure in time for the publication of this letter a complete statement of the imports between 1791 and 1799. From the imports into London and Liverpool in 1793 and 1794 it appears that the trade was in a very depressed state in those years. From that time it has kept improving and although some branches have experienced temporary depressions, the improvement upon the whole has been astonishingly great. The high price of cotton evinces, that the imports of last year have not been more than the consumption requires.

effects? If any improvement have been made in weaving, has it not its foundation in the previous improvements, effected by the spinner; and are not his improvements on the contrary, independent of any other part of the manufacture? Could this rapid increase of trade have possibly taken place without his improvements? Are not the superior quality of his manufacture and the great reduction in the prices of his yarns, together with the spirit of enterprize and improvement, which his undertakings have created and diffused, sufficient to account for this progress? From the year 1771 to 1780, before his improvements had taken place, the trade advanced very gradually and slowly, but from that time forward its steps have been gigantic, like the improvements of the spinner. Since the introduction of the fly-shuttle, what improvement has there been made in the process of weaving, by which any material abridgement of labour has been effected? None; and yet the nominal price of weaving has remained the same for many years in spite of the advanced price of labour and provisions, and the real price of weaving is now less than one half of that of former years. Is not this owing to the superior quality of the yarn, which enables the weaver to do more work in a given time and with more ease? Is there any thing else, that can account for this singular circumstance? How does it happen, that the nominal prices of such articles as were manufactured 30 years ago are in

some instances not materially different now from what they then were, and in others even lower, although the price of the raw material is doubled, and that of labour and provisions trebled? How have you been enabled to vie so successfully with your competitors on the continent, where labour and provisions are so much cheaper than here?—By the exercise of your mechanical talents; by the mechanical improvements which followed; by the successful application of machinery; *by substituting for manual labour agents, which consume no provisions and pay no taxes.* It is upon this ground that you must meet your opponents. If all the processes of your manufacture were carried on by manual labour, you could not possibly make head against your continental neighbours. If both you and they, on the contrary, performed every operation by machinery, you would be upon a tolerable equality with them; for your machinery would do its work as cheap as their's. But, if they carry on their manufactures by manual labour, while you employ machinery, you will have a decided superiority over them.——Cherish and encourage, therefore, those mechanical talents, from which you have already derived so much benefit, instead of checking and suppressing them by taxes and vexatious restrictions. Carefully avoid any measure, which may oblige your opponents on the continent to have recourse to machinery. If once the spirit for mechanical improvement obtain

abroad, your manufactory will receive a deadly blow. Force the spinning abroad, and it will do there what it has done here; the same cause will produce the same effect. Instead, therefore, of restraining the exportation of yarn, supply your neighbours with a liberal hand. Rather than lay any tax on the exportation, allow a bounty upon it. It will be much wiser to remove from foreigners every temptation to become spinners, than to increase the great inducements already existing, by measures which enhance the price of the yarn they purchase from you. At the same time follow the example of the spinner. Exert all your faculties to abridge labour in the other processes of your manufacture, by mechanical agents, and keep constantly in remembrance, that the use of machinery, as it abridges and saves labour, and thereby reduces the price of a commodity, and increases its consumption, will furnish employment to a greater number of hands, make their work easier, and increase their earnings.

I hope it will appear to you by what I have stated, that the spinning business is of the highest importance, not only as it employs and supports a large number of the industrious poor, but as the parent of almost every improvement in the manufacture of this town, the cause of its extent and prosperity, and the means by which your trade has been preserved, and new and valuable manufactures have been introduced. I trust you are convinced, that the spinning business is intitled to every

support and encouragement; that by laying it under restrictions, you will damp and eventually suppress the ingenuity and talents which have proved so beneficial, and dry up the source of future improvements; that every tax and restriction will afford an additional inducement to the manufacturer on the continent to become a spinner; and that by the introduction of machinery into his business a spirit of enterprize and mechanical improvement will be awakened, which will soon raise him to a most formidable rival.

In conclusion, I beg leave to state a fact, which has not yet been mentioned to the public, namely, that in most of the countries, to which cotton yarn is exported, the introduction of English piece-goods has been prohibited for many years. This is the case with Spain, Portugal, Prussia, and the hereditary dominions of the emperor of Germany. What reason can possibly be advanced to justifiy a restriction of the exportation of yarns to these countries?

I am with respect, my friends and fellow townsmen,

Your sincere well-wisher,

MERCATOR.

Manchester, May 13th. 1800.

R. & W. Dean, Manchester.